

Established in 1914

EAGLE TIMES

Focused on Local News

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It doesn't change things

The resignation of Sullivan County Manager Ed Gil De Rubio Monday should come as no surprise to anyone who has been following the disaster that is Sullivan County government the last year.

Gil de Rubio said a difference of opinion with the commission on the county's direction was a reason for his resignation. Recently, the commission removed his oversight authority for the county jail and nursing home. Then there were the contentious exchanges between Gil de Rubio and members of the Sullivan County delegation, most notably chairman Peter Franklin, D-Newport.

Franklin deserves credit for his vigilant style with the county finances but his brusque, accusatory manner, directed often at Gil de Rubio, only served to heighten animosity at delegation meetings, not discover solutions.

As county manager, Gil De Rubio may have been the easiest one to blame for the deficits of several million dollars last year and the probability of more of the same this year, but he isn't the only one. So his resignation should not be taken as some sort of sign that the county will begin turning things around immediately.

Gil de Rubio was hired in 2002 during a period in which the county was running annual deficits, primarily due to the nursing home. He leaves under similar circumstances. In between, taxpayers were told the decision to hire a private company to run the nursing home had eliminated deficits and in fact the nursing home was being operated without the support of tax dollars. We've since learned that was not the case. But just what the circumstances were behind the deficits remain unclear, and that is a big part of the problem with this county government, with or without Gil de Rubio. No one seems to be able to clearly explain why the finances are so muddled.

We'd be willing to wager few taxpayers understand what they have been reading about the county finances, in particular the nursing home, where it seems even small swings in the home's census can mean a loss or gain of thousands of dollars in daily revenues.

A day after Gil de Rubio's resignation was announced, the commissioners said they would be taking things over for the time being. Not a comforting thought given that the commissioners are as much to blame for the county's problems as anyone.

The commissioners seem content to limp along, hoping that someday, somehow revenues will grow and cover the expenses. If a miracle cure is on the horizon, we don't see it. The resignation of Gil de Rubio only means that someone else will inherit the problems.

The commissioners are elected to run the county government. Now is the time for a fresh start and a chance to show the sort of leadership that has been lacking for far too long.